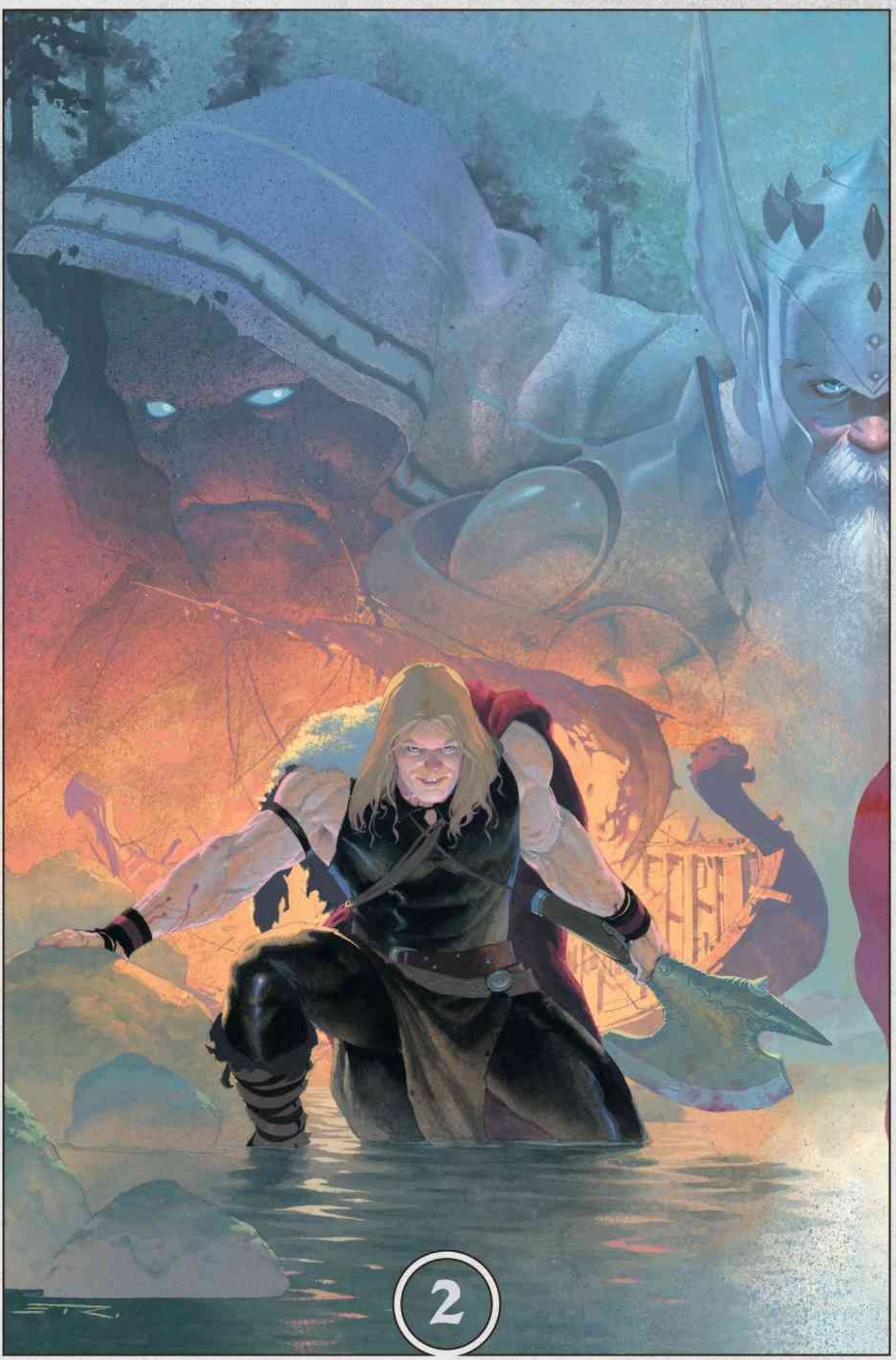
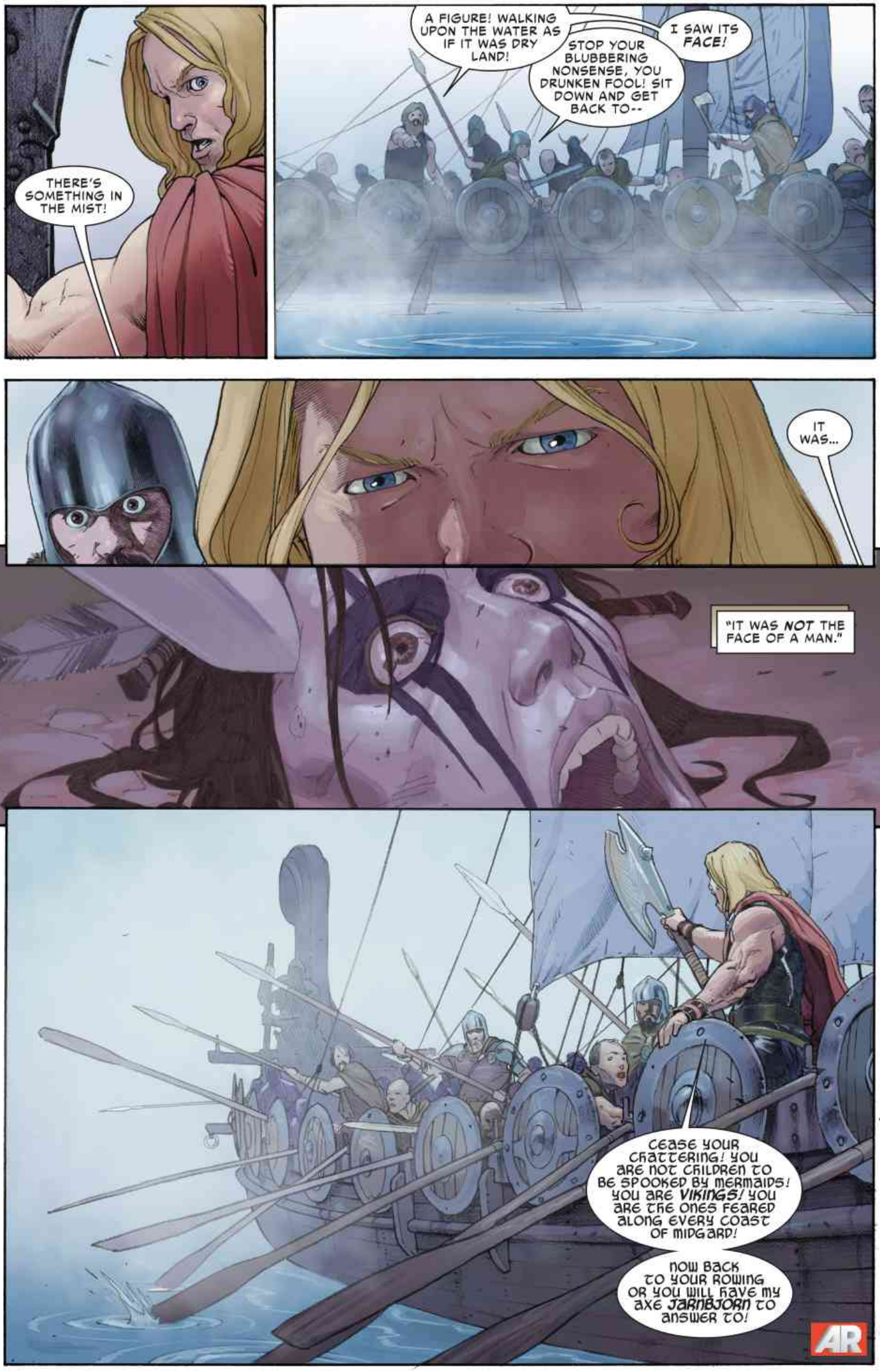


Blood in the Clouds

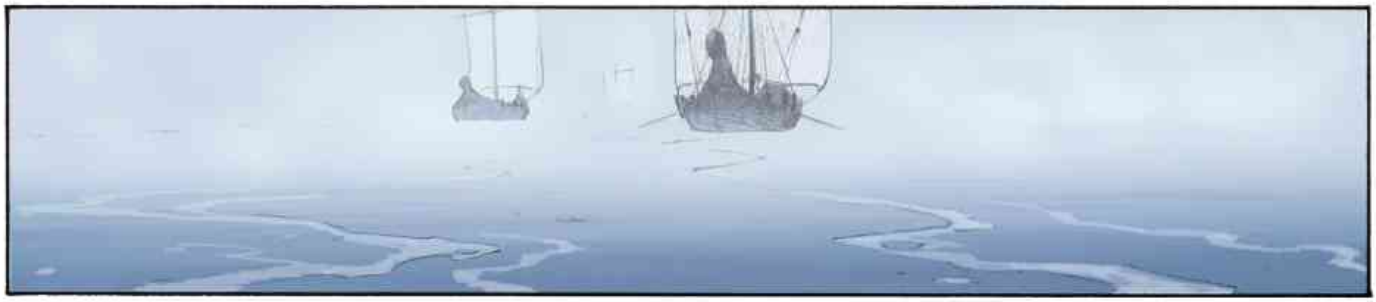
Many Years Ago, The Great Weapons Hall of Asgard,
FORGED BY DWARVES FROM MYSTIC URU METAL, IN FIRES THAT WOULD MELT THE SUN. LADEN WITH ENCHANTMENTS BY THE ALL-FATHER HIMSELF.
ABLE TO SHATTER WHOLE PLANETS AS EASY AS PEBBLES. IT IS THE MOST POWERFUL WEAPON IN ALL THE NINE REALMS.
BUT ONLY THE WORTHY MAY LIFT IT.
I HAVE WRESTLED DRAGONS WITH MY BARE HANDS. SLAIN WOLVES THE SIZE OF LONGBOATS. I HAVE FOUGHT IN MORE BATTLES THAN MOST GODS TWICE MY AGE. SO TELL ME...
HOW MUCH MORE WORTHY MUST I BE?
RRRRRRRRGGGH! MOVE, YOU BLASTED CHUNK OF METAL!
GAARRR!!!
BY THE BRISTLING BEARD OF ODIN, YOU ARE ONE STUBBORN HAMMER!
SOMEDAY, MJOLNIR, SOMEDAY YOU WILL BE MINE.
AND ON THAT BLESSED MORN, WHEN I FINALLY BESTRIDE THE HEAVENS, HAMMER IN HAND...

...WOE BE UNTO THE ENEMIES OF THOR.
RRRRRGGRR!!!
RRRRRRGHH!!!
FASTER, YOU DOGS!
THERE'LL BE NOTHING LEFT WORTH PILLAGING BY THE TIME WE GET THERE!

893 A.D.
The Baltic Sea.
YOU HEARD YOUR GOD OF THUNDER! ARE YOU NOT *NORSEMEN?* THEN WHY DO YOU ROW LIKE LAND-LOVING SAXONS?
ROW LIKE *VIKINGS* OR BE DAMNED, THE LOT OF YOU! ROW FOR DEATH AND GLORY!
ROW FOR *THOR!*
MY LORD...
...THE *FOG* GROWS THICKER. PERHAPS WE SHOULD SLOW OUR PACE OR ELSE RISK RUNNING AGROUND.
I HAVE SAILED THROUGH TEMPESTS OF FIRE IN THE BURNING LAND OF *MUSPELHEIM* AND ENDLESS HURRICANES OF ICE IN FROZEN *NIFFLEHEIM*. NO MERE FOG OF *MIDGARD* WILL SLOW THE SON OF ODIN.
CALM YOUR FEARS, MAN OF THE NORTH...
YOU HAVE THE EYES OF A *GOD* TO GUIDE YOU.


THERE'S SOMETHING IN THE MIST!
A FIGURE! WALKING UPON THE WATER AS IF IT WAS DRY LAND!
I SAW ITS FACE!
STOP YOUR BLUBBERING NONSENSE, YOU DRUNKEN FOOL! SIT DOWN AND GET BACK TO--
IT WAS...
"IT WAS NOT THE FACE OF A MAN."
CEASE YOUR CHATTERING! YOU ARE NOT CHILDREN TO BE SPOOKED BY MERMAIDS! YOU ARE VIKINGS! YOU ARE THE ONES FEARED ALONG EVERY COAST OF MIDGARD!
NOW BACK TO YOUR ROWING OR YOU WILL HAVE MY AXE JARNBJORN TO ANSWER TO!
AR

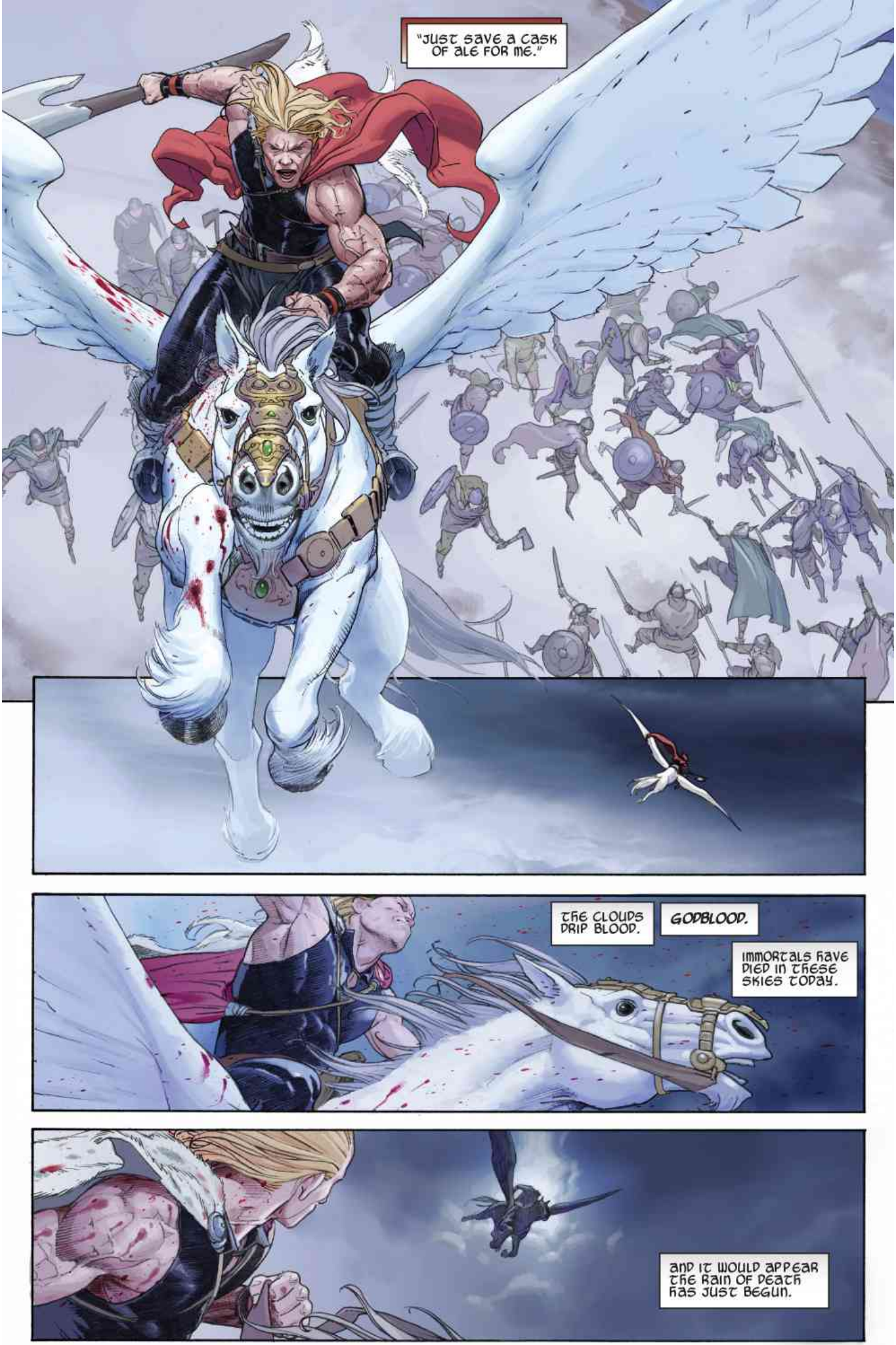
TELL THEM TO GO SLOWER, UNTIL THE FOG PASSES.
YES, MY LORD, BUT YOU SAID--
I KNOW WHAT I SAID. JUST DO IT.

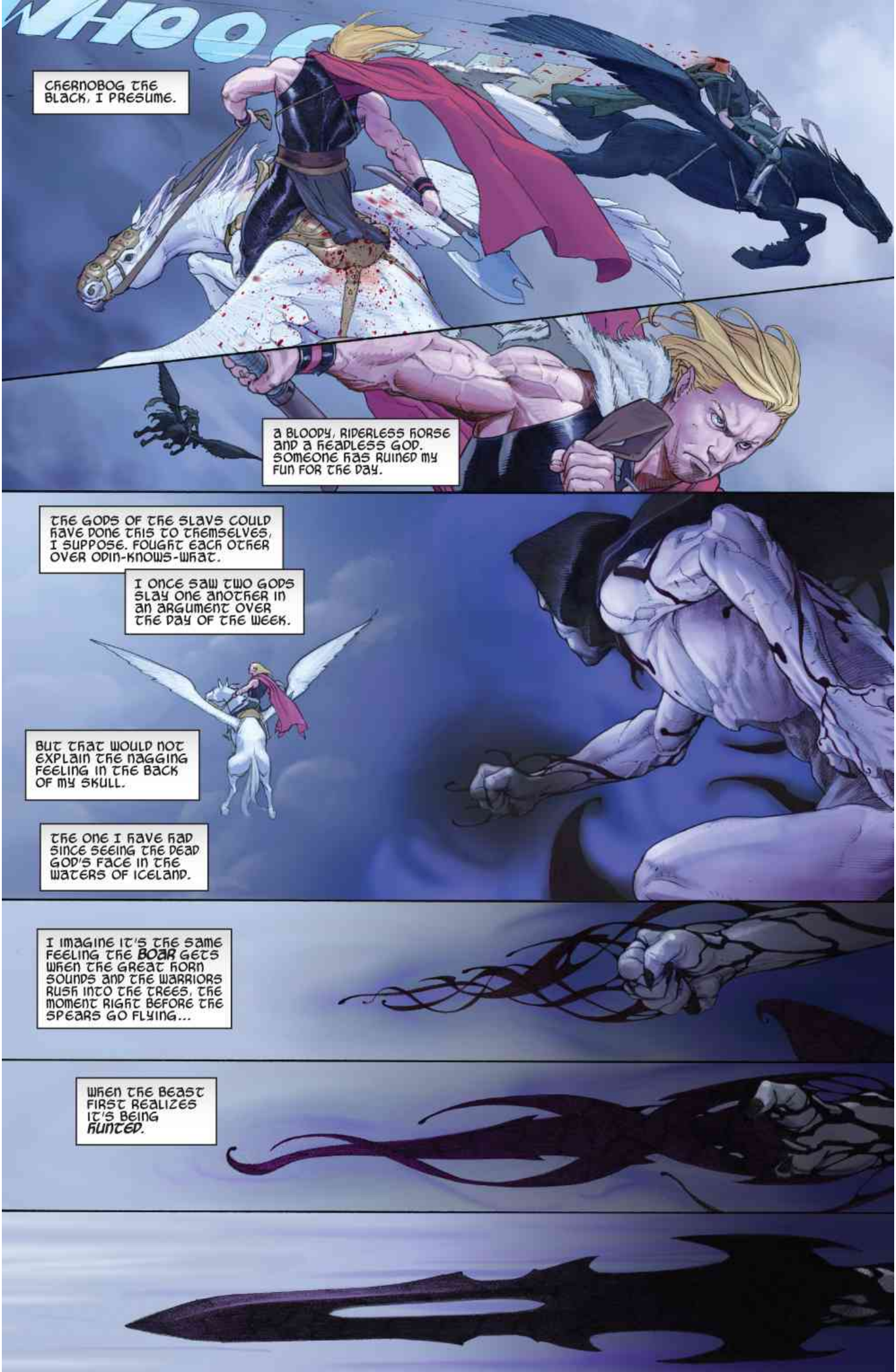


I SMELL...
GODFLESH.
LEAD AWAY, LITTLE GODLING.
LEAD ME TO YOUR KIN.

Three Days Later, Along the Banks of the Neva River, In What Will Someday Be Called Russia.
WE CAN WAIT NO LONGER! MY MEN HUNGER FOR DEATH AND PLUNDER! LET THE BATTLE BEGIN!
NO!
I DID NOT CROSS AN OCEAN MERELY TO FACE A BUNCH OF SLAVS WITH SPEARS! THOR WAS TOLD THERE WOULD BE GODS HERE!
RIVER MEN! WHERE ARE THE GODS YOU SWORE WOULD PROTECT YOU?! CALL THEM DOWN AND PRAY THAT THEY GIVE THOR A DECENT FIGHT!
OUR GODS WILL BE HERE SOON ENOUGH, NORSE SWINE! AND THEY WILL STILL THAT WAGGING TONGUE OF YOURS!
WHEN PERUN THE STORM LORD AND CHERNOBOG THE BLACK COME FLYING IN ON THEIR GREAT WINGED STALLIONS, GOLDEN AXES IN HAND, THUNDERBOLTS FLYING, YOU WILL SING A DIFFERENT--
HERE THEY COME!
LORD PERUN!
IS IT...IS IT HIM?
WAIT... I DON'T SEE...
THAT... IS YOUR GOD?

BEHOLD THE BLOODY HORSE OF DOOM, DEFENDER OF THE SLAVS!
THAT IS PERUN'S STEED, BUT...WHERE IS OUR GREAT GOD?
LORD THOR, IT WOULD APPEAR THEIR GODS HAVEN'T THE NERVE TO FACE YOU. MIGHT WE HAVE YOUR LEAVE TO--
DO AS YOU WISH.


"JUST SAVE A CASK OF ALE FOR ME."
THE CLOUDS DRIP BLOOD.
GODBLOOD.
IMMORTALS HAVE DIED IN THESE SKIES TODAY.
AND IT WOULD APPEAR THE RAIN OF DEATH HAS JUST BEGUN.


WHOOSH
CHERNOBOG THE BLACK, I PRESUME.
A BLOODY, RIDERLESS HORSE AND A HEADLESS GOD. SOMEONE HAS RUINED MY FUN FOR THE DAY.
THE GODS OF THE SLAVS COULD HAVE DONE THIS TO THEMSELVES, I SUPPOSE. FOUGHT EACH OTHER OVER ODIN-KNOWS-WHAT.
I ONCE SAW TWO GODS SLAY ONE ANOTHER IN AN ARGUMENT OVER THE DAY OF THE WEEK.
BUT THAT WOULD NOT EXPLAIN THE NAGGING FEELING IN THE BACK OF MY SKULL.
THE ONE I HAVE HAD SINCE SEEING THE DEAD GOD'S FACE IN THE WATERS OF ICELAND.
I IMAGINE IT'S THE SAME FEELING THE BOAR GETS WHEN THE GREAT HORN SOUNDS AND THE WARRIORS RUSH INTO THE TREES, THE MOMENT RIGHT BEFORE THE SPEARS GO FLYING...
WHEN THE BEAST FIRST REALIZES IT'S BEING HUNTED.

SHHHNNK
FEEL THAT, LITTLE LORD OF HEAVEN? THAT SENSE OF HELPLESSNESS AS YOU FALL?
THAT IS HOW IT FEELS TO BE MORTAL.
NEXT YOU WILL LEARN HOW IT FEELS TO BE BUTCHERED.

SWIP
AND THE LAST GOD YOU WILL EVER SEE!
ASGARDIAN, EH?
I BELIEVE YOU WILL BE MY FIRST OF THOSE. BUT FRET NOT OVER BEING LONELY.
YOUR ENTIRE PANTHEON WILL JOIN YOU BY THE TIME I AM THROUGH!
KLANG
OF THE DAY I LEARNED THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WAR AND MURDER.
AS I GAZE INTO THE FACE OF THIS KILLER OF GODS, I CANNOT HELP BUT BE REMINDED OF A TIME MANY YEARS AGO...
OF ANOTHER SET OF COLD, BLACK EYES. OF A MAD GOD IN A PIT.

I WAS JUST A BOY WHEN A GOD NAMED DAGR WENT ON A WANTON KILLING SPREE, ALL ACROSS THE NINE REALMS.
HE'D SLAIN HUNDREDS BY THE TIME THEY CAUGHT HIM AND TOSSED HIM IN A PIT IN ASGARD TO AWAIT HIS FATE. IN CONFUSION, I WENT TO ODIN.
THOUGH I WAS BARELY ABLE TO WALK, I HAD ALREADY SEEN MY FATHER SLAY THOUSANDS. INVADING TROLLS, WARRING GIANTS, WHOLE ARMIES.
HE WOULD COME HOME DRENCHED IN THEIR BLOOD, AND SONGS WOULD BE SUNG OF HIS GREATNESS.
THAT WAS WAR, MY FATHER TOLD ME. AND WAR WAS SOMETHING VERY DIFFERENT THAN WHAT DAGR HAD DONE.
HE SAID EVEN THE GREATEST OF WARRIORS NEVER RELISHED THE KILLING STROKE. TO DO SO WAS TO LOSE ONE'S SELF TO BLOODLUST. TO BECOME A MONSTER.
BUT STILL I WAS CONFUSED, SO LATE ONE NIGHT I SNUCK FROM MY BED CHAMBER AND CREPT THROUGH THE EMPTY HALLS OF ASGARD...
AND I WENT TO SEE THE MAD GOD IN THE PIT.

I only wanted to see his face. To see for myself how the eyes of a murderer were different than those of my father.
I gazed down into the pit, straining for a view. Next thing I knew, my footing had slipped...
and I was tumbling down into darkness.
I saw his eyes, all right.
But they weren't wild like I expected. They were calm and frighteningly serene.
I made ready to defend myself, to bite into his face with what few teeth I had.
But all he did was *talk*.

In a delicate voice. About what he'd done. About who he'd done it to and why.
The *why* I struggled to understand, but he spoke with such passion, such remarkable conviction, that it seemed more *my* failing than his.
He'd killed children no bigger than me, he said. Babies even. But the god in the pit never laid a hand on me.

And yet the way he looked at you so coldly through the darkness made you feel almost as if...
as if you were *already* dead.

I WAS IN THE PIT FOR FIVE HOURS BEFORE ANYONE FOUND ME.
CRACK
THE NEXT DAY, THE MURDEROUS GOD DIED BENEATH ODIN'S BLADE.
HE NEVER BEGGED FOR MERCY. NEVER FOR A SECOND SHOWED A BIT OF REMORSE. HIS SEVERED HEAD WAS STILL SMILING, STILL FULL OF PRIDE FOR WHAT HE'D MANAGED TO ACCOMPLISH.
ODIN AND THE OTHERS DISMISSED HIM AS MAD. BUT ONLY I KNEW THE TRUTH.
THAT WHAT HE *TRULY* WAS...
SWISH
WAS SOMETHING *FAR* MORE FRIGHTENING.

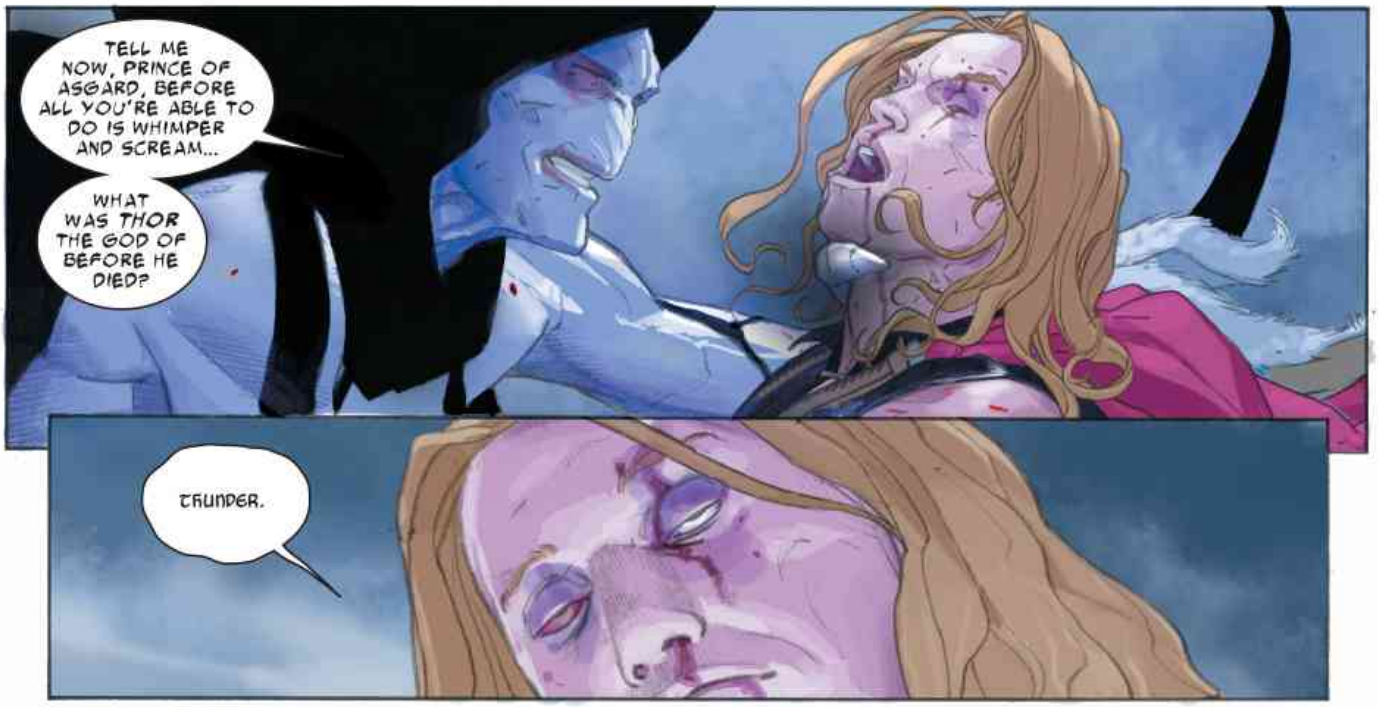
YOU'RE USED TO FIGHTING THINGS THAT SHIVER BEFORE YOU AND GAWK IN AWE AT YOUR GREATNESS, AREN'T YOU, GOD OF ASGARD?
NOT SOMEONE WHO DARES MEET YOUR DIVINE GAZE. LET ALONE GLARE BACK...
AARRGHH!
...WITH COMPLETE AND UTTER CONTEMPT FOR ALL THAT YOU ARE!
I AM USED TO FIGHTING WARRIORS! AND YOU ARE MOST DEFINITELY NOT THAT, BUTCHER OF GODS!
I HAVE SEEN YOUR LIKE BEFORE!
NO. NO, I DON'T BELIEVE YOU HAVE.
HARGH!!!
I DIDN'T SLEEP FOR WEEKS AFTER MY TIME IN THE PIT. I WAS HAUNTED BY THAT VOICE. BY THOSE EYES.
EVERY NIGHT FOR MONTHS I WOULD PRAY TO THE ELDER GODS THAT I MIGHT NEVER AGAIN HAVE TO GAZE UPON SUCH A VISAGE.
NOW IT SEEMS THAT AS WITH MOST PRAYERS IN LIFE...
...MINE HAVE GONE MOST PROFOUNDLY UNHEARD.

I CANNOT HELP BUT WONDER, LITTLE GOD, TO THE POOR DAMNED FOOLS BELOW US WHO WORSHIP YOU...
WHAT ARE YOU THE GOD OF?

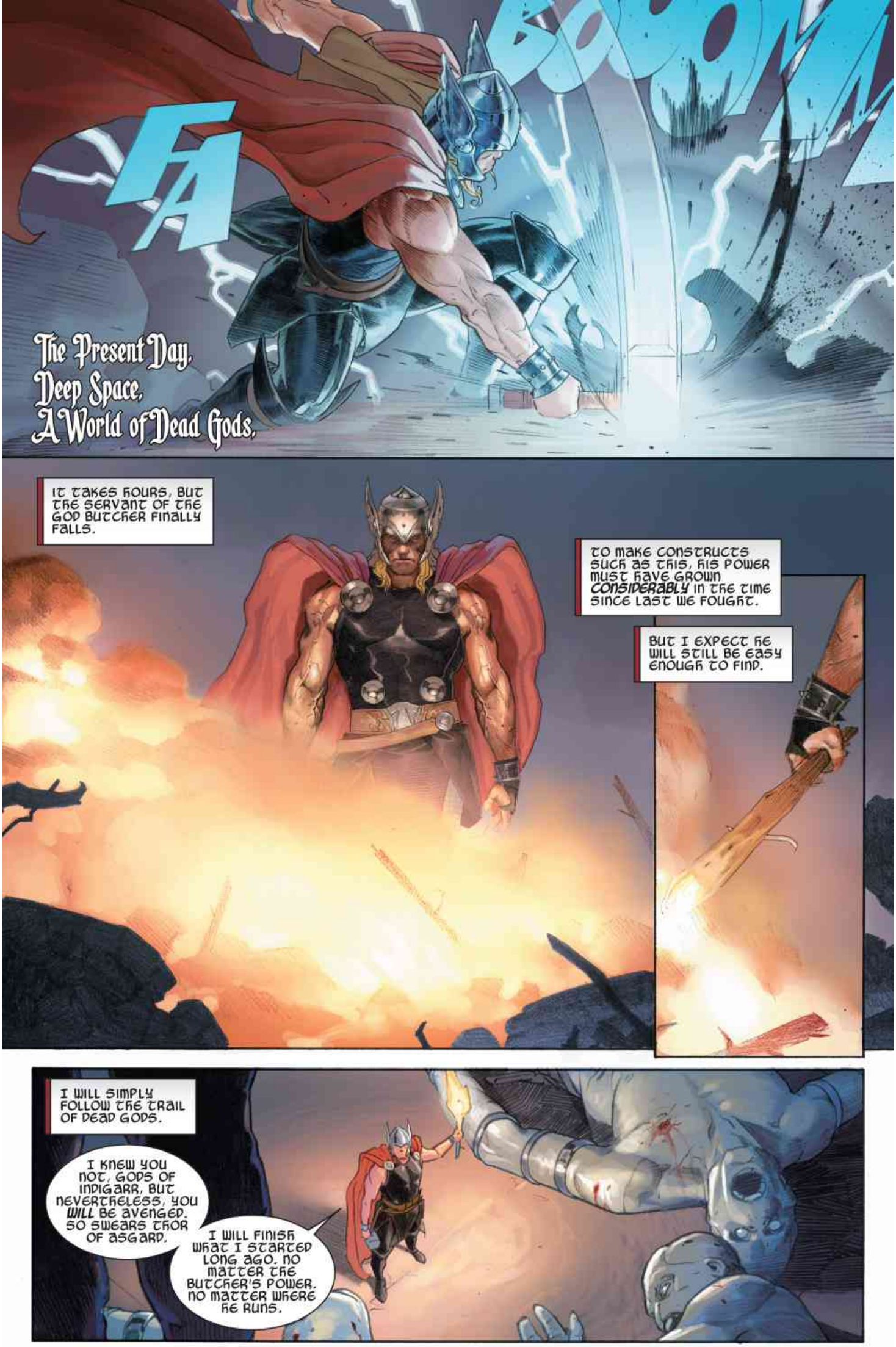
AXES? DRUNKENNESS? VANITY?
OR WAR PERHAPS? I HAVE KILLED SO VERY MANY GODS OF WAR.

AND GODS OF FEAR. GODS OF CHAOS. GODS OF BLOOD AND WRATH AND JEALOUSY AND LIES.
OF PLAGUES AND EARTHQUAKES. GENOCIDE AND REVENGE. OF DEGRADATION. OF DEATH.

VERY FEW GODS OF POETRY AND FLOWERS. THOUGH I KILLED THOSE JUST THE SAME.


TELL ME NOW, PRINCE OF ASGARD, BEFORE ALL YOU'RE ABLE TO DO IS WHIMPER AND SCREAM...
WHAT WAS THOR THE GOD OF BEFORE HE DIED?
THUNDER.

KRA
KOOOWW
GGRRRGGHH!!!


BOOM
The Present Day.
Deep Space.
A World of Dead Gods.
IT TAKES HOURS, BUT THE SERVANT OF THE GOD BUTCHER FINALLY FALLS.
TO MAKE CONSTRUCTS SUCH AS THIS, HIS POWER MUST HAVE GROWN CONSIDERABLY IN THE TIME SINCE LAST WE FOUGHT.
BUT I EXPECT HE WILL STILL BE EASY ENOUGH TO FIND.
I WILL SIMPLY FOLLOW THE TRAIL OF DEAD GODS.
I KNEW YOU NOT, GODS OF INDIGARR, BUT NEVERTHELESS, YOU WILL BE AVENGED. SO SWEARS THOR OF ASGARD.
I WILL FINISH WHAT I STARTED LONG AGO. NO MATTER THE BUTCHER'S POWER. NO MATTER WHERE HE RUNS.

"NO MATTER HOW LONG IT TAKES."
FLY, MJOLNIR! TO OMNIPOTENCE CITY! TO THE HALLS OF ALL-KNOWING!
FLY WITH ALL THE SPEED YOU CAN MUSTER! FOR THE LONGER WE TARRY...
"THE MORE GODS WHO WILL SUFFER."